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ON  
STUDIES

IN  
GENERAL HISTORY

AND THE  
HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION AT ITS  
FIRST PUBLIC MEETING, SARATOGA, SEPTEMBER 9, 1884.

By ANDREW D. WHITE  
President of the Association

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## ON STUDIES IN GENERAL HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION.

AT the founding of an association for the advancement of historical studies in the United States, it is natural that we look over the field to see in what directions and through what channels the activity of American historical scholars can be best directed.

In every branch of learning there are some fields into which all scholars in all nations may enter upon equal terms and with equal chances of success ; but there are also special fields in which each national group of scholars works at an advantage, and in which scholars in other nations must, as a rule, give the maximum of labor to the minimum of result ; and this is by no means least true in the study of history.

It is evident, for example, that the scholars of each nation have special advantages as regards investigation into the history of their own country : having closer access to its documents and finer appreciation of its modes of thought, they bring themselves more easily into the historical current flowing through their nation than a scholar from outside generally can. There are, indeed, exceptions to this rule. Such men as Ranke, Buckle, von Sybel, Sir James Stephen, Parkman, Baird, and Charles Kendall Adams, writing upon the history of France ; Guizot, Pauli, and Gneist, upon the general and constitutional history of England ; Motley, upon the history of Holland ; Prescott, Ticknor, and Dunham, upon the history of Spain ; Robertson, Bryce, Carlyle, and Herbert Tuttle, upon the history of Germany ; Haxthausen

and Wallace, upon the history of Russia; De Tocqueville, Laboulaye, and von Holst, upon the history of the United States, show that the general rule has many and striking exceptions, so many exceptions, indeed, as to indicate the existence of a subordinate rule which, simply stated, is that an individual standing outside of the country may be so disengaged and disentangled as to take a clearer view of questions in which religious or patriotic prejudices are involved than most scholars within the country are likely to do. Still, the large rule is unquestionably that the main work in the development of historical knowledge concerning any country must be done by the scholars of that country.

But besides these special fields there are general fields. These have to do with the evolution of man and society in human events through large reaches of time and space,—with a philosophical synthesis of human affairs, or what may be called the “summing up” of history.

These fields are open to thoughtful men of all countries alike; they can be studied with fairly equal chances of success by men in all parts of the world where human thought is not under some curb, and where the love of truth as truth and faith in truth as truth predominate over allegiance to any system, governmental, ecclesiastical, philosophical, or scientific.

While acknowledging the great value of special investigations and contributions to historical knowledge in individual nations, it is not too much to say that the highest effort and the noblest result toward which these special historical investigations lead is the philosophical synthesis of all special results in a large, truth-loving, justice-loving spirit.

Bearing on this point, Buckle, in a passage well worthy of meditation, has placed *observation* at the foot of the ladder, *discovery* next above it, and *philosophical method* at the summit. He has shown that without a true philosophical synthesis special investigations and discoveries often lead us far from any valuable fruits, and that such special investigations may be worse than no investigations at all.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See “History of Civilization in England,” English edition, vol. II., p. 387.

To these general considerations as to fields may be added something as to motives of study. The scholar may indeed find his motive for any special study in curiosity, or pride, or the desire to strengthen himself in his profession, or to exalt the fame of his neighborhood or country. Out of such motives indeed good things may grow, and there may come to these growths a beautiful bloom and fruitage; but even the best of these must be special and partial. The great, deep ground out of which large historical studies may grow is the ethical ground,—the simple ethical necessity for the perfecting, first, of man as man, and, secondly, of man as a member of society; or, in other words, the necessity for the development of humanity on the one hand and society on the other. Hence it would appear that, precious as special investigations may be, most precious of all is that synthesis made by enlightened men looking over large fields, in the light of the best results of special historical research, to show us through what cycles of birth, growth, and decay various nations have passed; what laws of development may be fairly considered as ascertained, and under these what laws of religious, moral, intellectual, social, and political health or disease; what developments have been good, aiding in the evolution of that which is best in man and in society; what developments have been evil, tending to the retrogression of man and society; how various nations have stumbled and fallen into fearful errors, and by what processes they have been brought out of those errors; how much the mass of men as a whole, acting upon each other in accordance with the general laws of development in animate nature, have tended to perfect man and society; and how much certain individual minds, which have risen either as the result of thought in their time, or in spite of it—in defiance of any law which we can formulate—have contributed toward this evolution. Here as to results we have a verification of that pithy line of Publius Syrus, *Discipulus est prioris posterior dies.*

This study of history, either as a whole or in large



parts, is of vast value both as supplying the method and the test of special studies on the one hand, and of meeting the highest necessities of man on the other. We may indeed consider it as the trunk of which special histories and biographies are the living branches, giving to them and receiving from them growth and symmetry, drawing life from them, sending life into them.

That such a connection between general and special investigation, between critical analysis of phenomena on the one hand and synthesis of results on the other, is not a theory but a pregnant fact, can be easily seen by a glance over the historical work going on in our own time.

Take first France. The large treatment in Bossuet's Universal History, in Voltaire's *Essai sur les Mœurs*, and in the essays of Condorcet and Turgot, was the cause and, to some extent, the result of a remarkable growth of special histories in the last century. The great philosophical treatise of Guizot upon the history of civilization in Europe, the monumental work of Professor Laurent, of Ghent, upon the history of humanity traced along the lines of international law, and the works of Daunou, Roux-Ferrand, Michelet, and Henri Martin, have been causes and results of a great new growth of special historical investigations in this century. There is no time here to dwell upon individuals, but I may at least mention the works of Thierry, Mignet, Quinet, and Lanfrey, as examples of precious special histories which would never have been written save in the light of these general philosophical histories. If it be said that Thiers is an exception to the rule, I answer that his career is but a proof of it, and that the reason why he has been the most pernicious special pleader among French historians and the greatest architect of ruin among modern French statesmen, may be found in his distinct denial of any philosophical basis of history whatever.<sup>1</sup>

Take next England. We see such masterpieces of general historical work as those of Gibbon and Robertson in

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<sup>1</sup> See Thiers' "Consulat et l'Empire," vol. XII., Preface.



the last century, and Grote, Buckle, Whewell, and Lecky in this, acting powerfully both as causes and results of special histories.

Take our own country. The works of Bancroft and Hildreth, the History of International Law by Henry Wheaton, the fragmentary lectures of President Dew, of William and Mary College, the introductory chapters of Prescott's Ferdinand and Isabella and Motley's Dutch Republic, the History of the Intellectual Development of Europe by Draper—warped though it is by his view of the analogy between national and individual development,—and such recent works as those of Lea, Charles Kendall Adams, McMaster, Coit Tyler, Lodge, Parkman, and others, with the work now going on at Cambridge, the State Universities of Michigan and Wisconsin, Johns Hopkins and Cornell Universities, show this same law in full force.

And if we go to fields more remote, we find in Italy the great philosophical generalizations of Vico working down through the writings of Sismondi, Colletta, Villari, Cantù, Bonghi, Settembrini, and a host of others. Even in Spain we find that Balmés, thoughtful as he is, having simply the thought and depth of a special pleader, stimulates men with the same defects in special fields.

But greatest proof of all that these two growths of historical thought are vitally connected, is to be found in even the most rapid survey of the work going on in Germany. Of the vast number of special growths I have no time to present the slightest sketch; their thoroughness and extent are exemplified in the *Monumenta Germaniæ* as carried on by Waitz, Wattenbach, and their compeers. But the work in the study of general world-history and the history of civilization has developed both as a cause and result of this special work. Of broad and philosophical treatises we have such world-histories, of different merits, as those of Leo, Schlosser, Weber, and Ranke; and, covering parts of the great field but in the same general spirit, such works as those of Ranke, Mommsen, Ernst Curtius, Droysen, Giesebrecht, Gregorovius, and a multitude of others; and in his-

tories of civilization such as those of Wachsmuth, DuBois Reymond, Biedermann, Carriere, Henne-Am Rhyn, Kolb, Hellwald, Honegger, Grün, Lazarus, Prutz, and others,—a list extending through the whole gamut of capacity. I adduce these facts, and especially this luxuriance of growth in German general historical studies, simply to show that such general growths go with special historical study, and that, however much we do and ought to do in this country as to special investigation, an indication of healthful growth will be found in general and synthetical work even though some of it be inadequate.

And here allow me to call your attention to the use of the term "investigation." There appears frequently an idea that the word can be justly applied only to search into minute material facts and documents; but is it not just as true that investigation can be made into the relations and laws of facts? So, too, regarding a phrase we constantly hear, "the advancement of knowledge." But is knowledge advanced alone by the study of minute facts and occurrences? May it not also be advanced by a study of relations and methods and of laws governing such facts and occurrences? Investigation is as truly a means to the advancement of knowledge in the hands of the philosophic historian dealing with general history, as in those of the most minute annalist dealing with some forgotten piece of diplomacy or strategy. Did it not require as much original investigation, and was not the field of knowledge as much increased, when Guizot gave us his profound and fruitful generalizations as to the laws governing and consequences flowing from national development in civilization, under the influence of one or many elements, as when Gachard discovered the facts regarding the cloister life of Charles V., or when Mr. Poole showed the connection of Manasseh Cutler with the Northwestern territorial ordinance? The two—general and special investigation—must go together. So it was in Guizot's case; so it should be in all cases.

But let us now look somewhat more closely into this

matter of the investigation of historical facts, especially as to the ends sought and the qualities required. Doubtless the end sought is exact truth, and the first quality required, veracity. But then comes the question: what truth, and, veracity on what lines? Take a case. Two men investigate the formation of one of our State constitutions. One knows little of the constitutional development of our other States, or of the nation, or of foreign countries. He gives us a plain, dry statement of the facts which he sees, which, of course, are mainly surface facts. He is particular to give us the dates of sessions, the names of chalmers, the heads of committees, the makers and matter of speeches. The other, of equal veracity, knows much of the development of constitutional history in our own and other nations. He, too, gives us what he sees; and therefore he makes the fundamental facts shine through the surface annals. We have simply the difference here between the history of the birth of an American commonwealth, by a keen, rural lawyer—as keen, if you please, as Thiers—on the one hand, and on the other by a Story, a Cooley, or a Stubbs. Take another case. Two men investigate the history of popular government in one of our great cities—New York, perhaps. One is a careful, painstaking annalist, and nothing more. He masters the surface facts so far as they are given by chronicles of various sorts, from Stuyvesant and Governor Dongan's charter to the overthrow of Tweed and to the supremacy of Kelly. The other is just as careful and truthful, but something more. He has studied and meditated upon other cities; he has perhaps done what Ruskin insists that every true scholar ought to do—has studied the history of the five great cities of the world; has meditated upon the growth of the commercial spirit in the Italian city republics, in the Hanseatic League, and in the great English seaports; upon the growth of city factions from the days of Claudius and Milo in Rome, through the Blues and Greens in Constantinople, the Bianchi and Neri in Florence, the Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants in the cities of Holland, and the New York "Halls";

upon outbursts of civic public spirit like those which produced the Parthenon at Athens, the Duomo at Florence, and the town-halls of the Netherlands; upon the good and evil tendencies of accumulated civic wealth from Crassus, Jacques Cœur, and the Medici, to Peabody, and Cooper, and Vanderbilt; upon the tendencies of a civic proletary class as typified in such examples as the Marian prescriptions in Rome, the dealings of the mobs in mediæval Laon and Liège with their bishops, the Terror and Commune of Paris, the Know-Nothing riots of Philadelphia and the Draft riots of New York. Who does not see that the latter scholar will reveal masses of important facts and relations which the other can never find?

Again, two men set out to investigate the growth of some phase of belief. Both are veracious, but one is simply minute, painstaking, limited by sectarian trammels, with little light from outside history; the other has made broad studies in comparative philology and religion. Which is likely to give us something that, even considered purely as an investigation, is of real value?

But it is not necessary to suppose cases. Every reader of history can recall real cases of "investigation" "extending the boundaries of knowledge," showing the vast difference between the annalist and the historian. Take one of the most recent. Professor Ihne, in his admirable *History of Rome*, has made a new investigation of the story of Publius Æbutius and the panic persecution of the Bacchanalian fanatics. Who that reads his account does not see that the most important element in his investigation comes from his general knowledge, and that he throws a powerful light into the depths of the story from his knowledge of the inmost spirit of the panic persecutions of the early Christians, of the Jews in the Middle Ages, and of the Roman Catholics in England under Charles II.?<sup>1</sup>

And now allow me to call attention to some subordinate indications as to method, given by general history to special history. Greatly as I admire the main drift of Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ihne's "*History of Rome*," chap. XIII.

Herbert Spencer's argument upon historical studies in his treatise on Education, some of his statements seem to me to require limitation. He seems at times to confuse the study of history with the study of statistics, and thus to demand scientific proof when the nature of the material can only give moral proof.<sup>1</sup> The analogy between the study of history and of travel has justly struck many minds, and throws some side light upon Mr. Spencer's confusion. Let us observe this analogy in making a case. Two young Americans go to England for a year. One devotes himself, in strict accordance with Mr. Spencer's theory, to "descriptive sociology," which, under the rules laid down by Mr. Spencer, results in the statistical tabulation of a vast multitude of facts; the other occupies himself in getting at the thought of the time, dominant or militant, by reading the best books, by talking with the best men in every field, by noting ends and methods in work of all sorts, by studying, comparatively, various ways of solving political and social problems, by observing society in all its branches, even by listening to the current chatter and prattle, in the various social strata. Both may come back useful men; but I think that none of us will deny that, as a man, the second—the historian—will be far better developed, and as a thinker, writer, or man of affairs far better equipped than the first—the statistician. Mr. Spencer has much to say regarding worthless sources and worthless facts. The truth is, a fact which appears very petty may be of vast value if it be pregnant, and a fact which appears very important is worthless if it be barren. Louis XIV. receiving Condé on the great staircase of Versailles was an immense fact at the time; to us, in the light of general history, it is worth little or nothing. Louis XVI. calling for bread and cheese when arrested at Varennes, and declaring it the best bread and cheese he ever ate, furnishes a fact apparently worthless, but really of significance, for it reveals that easy-going helplessness which was so important a factor in the wreck of the old French monarchy,—indeed, that very spirit of which

<sup>1</sup> See Herbert Spencer on "Education," chap. I.



Thomas Jefferson so amusingly generalized the causes and results in his letter to Governor Langdon.

The fact that Rufus Choate filled this republic with his mellifluous eloquence as a special pleader and was sent to the Senate of the United States, great as it then appeared, is now, as tested by the laws of general history, of no value. On the other hand, the fact that William Lloyd Garrison was editing a petty paper in Boston, unworthy of notice as it seemed then, is now found to be one of the great facts in American history—indeed, a most instructive fact in general history.

This test applied by general history to special throws into its true light much of the cant now current regarding the worthlessness of information as to battles, sieges, and treaties, and the supreme worth of facts regarding the popular life.

Mr. Spencer speaks contemptuously of historical attention to battles; yet battles may be important, and a little battle may be of vast value, and a great battle of none. The little battle of Saratoga is of great importance as a turning point in the history of mankind; the great battle of Austerlitz is of comparatively little importance, because it shows merely the result of a clash between two temporary developments in European politics. Mr. Spencer makes little of the reading of memoirs; yet the little memoir of the Baroness Riedesel throws a flood of light upon the spirit in which this little battle of Saratoga was fought and in which this American colonial empire was lost by British mercenaries and won by American yeomanry; indeed, it throws a light into the depths of philosophic history, for it shows the force of a love of freedom against the service of despotism.

Mr. Spencer tells us that "familiarity with court intrigues, plots, usurpations, and the like, and with all the personalities accompanying them, aids very little in elucidating the causes of national progress." This is in the main just, yet somewhat too sweeping. Few subjects in modern history are more fruitful in valuable thought than the rise, glory, and



decline of the absolute monarchy in France from Richelieu to Necker. Every historical scholar, no matter whether he agree with Buckle's theory or not, must acknowledge his masterly use of this subject in conveying some of the most important moral and political lessons to our present world. But how much less would have been Buckle's knowledge of the inner workings of that time had there not been open to him and to us the memoirs and diaries of St. Simon, Dangeau, Barbier, and the like. It is very doubtful whether the most elaborate collection of statistics would compensate for their loss.

Mr. Spencer also pours contempt, and with much justice, over details of battles. And yet, while sympathizing largely with his statement in this respect, a careful historian must confess that there are details of battles which the thoughtful student may well keep in mind. For example, when at the beginning of our recent civil war our Northern troops yielded at Bull Run and elsewhere to the first onset of the enemy, it was of some value to remember, in estimating the significance of such a yielding, that in the first battles of the French Revolution with Europe the troops afterward so successful broke more than once in this same manner. There are those of us who can remember how precious a knowledge of this little historical fact was to us then, and one, to my personal knowledge, used it before large audiences to keep up the courage of his fellow-citizens in that time of peril.

Mr. Spencer asks: "Suppose that you diligently read accounts of all the battles that history mentions, how much more judicious would your vote be at the next election?" Thinking Americans of the age which most of us have reached bear an answer to this question stamped vividly in our memories. In the fearful crisis of our Civil War there were certain histories, of which battles formed a large part, that were precious. I remember at that time when at one of our greatest universities bodies of students came to my lecture-room asking: "What shall we read?" my answer was: "Read the history of Rome just after the battle

of Cannæ; read Motley's history of the Dutch Republic, and especially of the siege of Leyden; read Macaulay's account of the siege of Londonderry; read Provost Stillé's pamphlet, 'How a Great People Carried on a Long War.' " All of us know that at many elections, perhaps at most of them, the question is not one of knowledge but of conduct; that is, not "What ought I to do?" but "Have I the courage to do what I ought?" Sometimes historical facts which cannot be shaped into sociological tables aid us to answer either or both of these questions. The fact above referred to—that another leading nation, though its troops broke up in panic two or three times at first, carried a vast war to ultimate victory—was used at the beginning of our Civil War for the very purpose of enlightening citizens as to their duty in "voting at the next election,"—used to show them that they should not vote for candidates who represented public discouragement and the tendency to make a compromise involving either disunion or the retention of slavery, forever, in the Constitution of the United States.

So, too, I recall another historical fact which was used with effect at that time to keep up the courage of our people as to voting men and means for the war, and voting for candidates determined to resist disunion and the perpetuation of slavery. It was a fact which would probably never occur to any one as fitting into a sociological table, and yet it was to the American people an important fact. It was simply that at the beginning of the great English Civil War, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the first race of generals on the popular side—men like Manchester and Essex—failed because they could not thoroughly appreciate the questions at issue, and that success came only when men of sterner purpose were put in command. This historical fact, both in its development and results, was perfectly paralleled in our own history.

So, too, as to treaties. The treaty of Paris after the Crimean war has but a temporary interest; the treaty of Westphalia has been active in the development of Europe, political, intellectual, and moral, down to this hour.

So, too, as to facts apparently dried up and withered. A pamphlet by a forgotten sophist like Royer, and a speech by a contemptible demagogue like Gouy, at the beginning of the French Revolution, giving reasons for unlimited issues of paper-money then, are facts which would appear in no table of descriptive sociology; and yet, when this republic had recently to deal with the most momentous question since the Civil War,—the question of wild finance and currency inflation,—the arguments in Royer's pamphlet and Gouy's speech, and others like them, which were once used to plunge France into the abyss of bankruptcy and ruin by unlimited issues of paper-money, were exhibited in our own country with decided effect, before committees at Washington, before meetings of business men in New York, and in campaign pamphlets. They were certainly facts of vast importance with reference to "a vote at the next election,"—a vote which was to decide whether this republic should be, by similar arguments and policy, plunged into misery and disgrace.

So, too, as to facts regarding individual action: Aristotle in the apothecary shop, Plato in the grove, Erigena and Thomas Aquinas in the schools, Copernicus in his cell, Newton in the orchard, Cardinal D'Ailly writing his *Imago Mundi*, Grotius writing his *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, Comenius writing his little *Orbis Pictus*, Volta in his university, Watt in his work-room, Descartes turning from natural science to philosophy, Paolo Sarpi advising the Venetian Republic how to meet an interdict, and writing his History of the Council of Trent, Thomasius publishing his treatise against witchcraft in the name of a student, Beccaria writing his little book on Crimes and Punishments, Adam Smith writing his Wealth of Nations, Kant writing his Critiques of the Pure and Practical Reason, Beaumarchais writing his *Mariage de Figaro*, Harriet Beecher Stowe writing her Uncle Tom's Cabin, Darwin on the Beagle, Cavour meeting Napoleon III. at Plombières, Bismarck meeting Frederick William IV. at Venice, Lincoln taking the stump in Illinois,—what facts are these!

The simple truth is that there are facts and facts. In the beginning of this century, Metternich prompting the policy of Europe was supposed to be great; Stein in his bureau was thought of little account. In our own time, Napoleon III. on the throne was apparently a great fact; but how much greater a fact was Pasteur in his laboratory! In England foolish Lord John Russell, reading homilies to the cabinets of Europe and nearly blundering into a great war with the United States, was called a statesman and seemed a controlling personage; but how small his real influence on England or the world at large compared with that of the rather forlorn Prince Consort, who, despite his birth and environment, and the limitations imposed by a sneering court and jealous people, labored so successfully for the development of art and science throughout the world, and used his influence against the war which the folly of Lord John Russell did so much to bring on.

The simple rule and test which general history and the history of civilization give to special investigation is that if close knowledge of a battle, or an intrigue, or a man is important to our knowledge of the great lines of historical evolution, then these facts are important; if not, they are not important.

To the statement, then, that history has occupied itself too much with kings and courts and conquerors, and that it should "occupy itself with the people," a true historical synthesis gives answer that history must occupy itself with men and events which signify something. The men may be saints or miscreants, popes or monks, kings or peasants, conquerors or conspirators, builders of cathedrals or weavers of verse, railway kings or day laborers, publicists or satirists, philanthropists or demagogues, statesmen or mob orators, philosophers or phrase mongers. The event may be a poem or a constitution, a battle or a debate, a treaty or a drama, a picture or a railway, a voyage or a book, a law or an invention, the rise of a nation or the fall of a clique.

Meeting our ethical necessity for historical knowledge with statistics and tabulated sociology entirely or mainly, is

like meeting our want of food by the perpetual administration of concentrated essence of beef.

Again, is it possible to reduce necessary historical knowledge to such concentrated and tabulated form? There are statistics and statistics; some increase our perception of truth, some decrease it. As an example of both these facts, take a statement made in Montesquieu's *Greatness and Decline of the Romans*, with Mr. Baker's excellent notes.<sup>1</sup> Montesquieu shows statistically and very effectively that in the early days of Rome the ratio of soldiers to population was as one to eight, whereas in Europe in Montesquieu's time it was about one to a hundred; and that this latter is the highest rate which can safely be maintained in a modern state. Mr. Baker corroborates this in a very striking manner, by showing that the number of persons serving in the armies and navies of the great modern European states remains about one to one hundred. Now, so far, these statistics increase our perception of truth. They show simply but conclusively how much more strongly the warlike feeling was cherished in Rome, when, instead of one soldier or sailor to a hundred, as in the modern States, there was one to eight.

But, on the other hand, take another statistical statement, which is, that under the Roman Empire, at the time of its greatest expansion, there was only one soldier and sailor to 266 of the population, a ratio but little more than one third as great as that in the seven great military states of Europe to-day.<sup>2</sup> This statistical statement, apart from other knowledge, would inevitably lead to the conclusion that the Roman Empire had ceased to wage war; that, as compared to the great modern states of Europe, it thought little of self-defence, and needed to think little of it; whereas the fact is that Rome at that very time was perpetually at war, that war was its greatest concern,—in fact, that its statesmen thought of little else on a large scale besides war.

<sup>1</sup> See Montesquieu's "*Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans*," chaps. III. and XV., with Baker's notes.

<sup>2</sup> See Montesquieu, as above, chap. XV.



Again, there are material statistics and moral statistics, and to each must be assigned a proper place. The corruption and decline of Rome is one of the most important and suggestive things in human annals. This corruption and decline is as real as the existence of Rome itself. But how are we to understand it? Material statistics as to the amount of territory conquered, wealth swept into Rome after the Carthaginian and Eastern wars, agricultural populations pauperized, slaves substituted for yeomen, *latifundia* substituted for peasant farms, and the like, if we could obtain them, might be of use. But there are moral statistics of no less value. A poem of Lucretius, showing that thinking men had outlived the old faith, and that a great chasm had been opened between reason and religious institutions; Cicero's vacillating treatment of torture in procedure; a dialogue of Lucian, showing that the old religion had utterly broken down; a fling in Juvenal, at the hysterical superstitions arising, especially among women; a sentence in Tacitus approving the execution of four hundred slaves of Pedanius Secundus because one of them, unknown to the others, had murdered their master; the picture of a gladiatorial combat by Gérôme, and Alma Tadema's picture of the prætorians dragging Claudius to the throne,—in each of these facts is included a whole column of moral statistics, which enable us to see far into the spirit of the time and the causes of that imperial decline, as columns of material statistics might not do.

Take another field—the moral deterioration of France preparatory to the Revolution. This was a fact of vast moment to Europe. Doubtless statements could be tabulated to show this deterioration, but what statistics could throw so much light into it as the simple fact that the sainted Fénelon was succeeded in the archbishopric of Cambray by the infamous Cardinal Dubois; that while the government had disgraced Fénelon, it loaded Dubois with honors; and that while the clergy had without a murmur allowed Fénelon to be crushed, they invited Dubois to pre-  
side over their National Assembly.



Take a very different subject. The wild partisan madness of England toward France, which pushed on the war against the first French Republic, teaches a philosophical and practical lesson to every modern nation. What statement can be tabulated so as to show it? Yet a single caricature of Gillray, glorifying that infamous assassination by the Austrians of Bonnier and Roberjot, the French envoys to the Congress of Rastadt, with the punning inscription exulting in that worst breach of international law in modern times, tells the whole story.

Take a still more recent field. The material statistics as to the diminution in the height of soldiers in the French army during the later wars of Napoleon are of great value as showing not only the fearful state of exhaustion to which the empire was reduced, but the price which a nation has to pay for "glory." Look, now, at a moral statistic showing the same thing. One of the memoir writers<sup>1</sup> tells us that when Napoleon, after throwing away his army of over five hundred thousand men in the Moscow campaign, had hurried back to France and had entered the Tuileries almost alone, he rubbed his hands before the fire and simply said: "Decidedly it is more comfortable here than in Moscow," with no further mention of the loss that France had sustained, and evidently with no sympathy for the millions whom he had bereaved. Here is a moral statistic to the same effect as the material statistic just cited, and of equal value in showing the spirit in which Napoleonism wrought, and, indeed, from the point of view of general history, the spirit which military despotism necessarily engenders.

Again, take the history now going on among ourselves. The future historian of the United States will, no doubt, give especial attention to the reunion of the Northern and Southern States as a homogeneous nation after the Civil War. This process is going on at this moment. What material facts that can be tabulated into a descriptive sociology throw any light upon it? I can see none. If you say the statistics of the votes in the Electoral Colleges cast

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<sup>1</sup> Bourrienne, I think.

at the last presidential election, my answer is that these will certainly mislead the future historian if he is not very careful, for they would seem to show an absolute and complete break between North and South—a separation greater than before the war. But are there not moral statistics of far more real value in this case showing the very opposite of this? I think so. Take the simple fact that Judge Finch's poem, "The Blue and the Gray," is recited on Decoration Day, North and South; take the fact that Mr. Atkinson delivered his address at the Georgia Exposition and found most respectful audience for his very plain statements of Southern shortcomings which before the war would very likely have cost him his life; take the hospitable reception of Northern military companies in the South bearing the flag against which the Southern men risked their lives with a bravery very notable in human annals;—these are types of a multitude of facts which can be arranged in no table of material statistics, but which are moral indications of the greatest value.

And now as to certain limitations in the methods of investigation imposed upon us by circumstances peculiar to ourselves. I remember several years ago hearing a gentleman, temporarily eminent in politics (one of Carlyle's *hommes alors célèbres*) in a speech before the authorities of an American university, declare that all history must be rewritten from an American point of view. This assertion, at the time, seemed to savor of that vagueness and largeness often noted in the utterances of the American politician upon his travels, which, in our vernacular, is happily named "tall talk"; but as the statement has recurred to my mind at various periods since, it has seemed to me that our political friend uttered more wisely than he knew. For is it not true that we, in this republic, called upon to help build up a new civilization, with a political and social history developing before us of which the consequences for good or evil are to rank with those which have flowed from the life of Rome and the British Empire,—is it not true that, for us, the perspective of a vast deal of history is

changed; that the history which, for the use of various European populations, has been written with minute attention to details, must be written for us in a larger and more philosophical way?

And is it not true that the history so rapidly developing here is throwing back a new light upon much history already developed? What legislator cannot see that the history of our American municipalities throws light upon the republics of the Middle Ages, and derives light from them? What statesman cannot understand far better the problem of the British government in Ireland in the light of our own problem in the city of New York? What classical scholar cannot better understand Cleon the leather-seller, as we laugh at the gyrations of a certain American politician now "starring it in the provinces"? What publicist cannot weigh more justly the immediate pre-revolutionary period in France as he notes a certain thin, loose humanitarianism of our day which is making our land the paradise of murderers? What historical student cannot more correctly estimate the value of a certain happy-go-lucky optimism which sees nothing possible but good in the future, when he recalls the complacent public opinion, voiced by the Italian historian just before 1789, that henceforth peace was to reign in Europe, since great wars had become an impossibility?<sup>1</sup> What student of social science cannot better estimate the most fearful anti-social evil among us by noting the sterility of marriage in the decline of Rome and in the eclipse of France?

In this sense I think that the assertion referred to as to the rewriting of history from the American point of view contains a great truth; and it is this modified view of the evolution of human affairs, of the development of man as man, and of man in society, that opens a great field for American philosophic historians, whether they shall seek to round the whole circle of human experience, or simply to present some arc of it.

The want of such work can be clearly seen on all sides.

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<sup>1</sup> See Cantù, "*Histoire des Italiens*."

Not one of us reads the current discussions of public affairs in Congress, in the State Legislatures, or in the newspapers, who does not see that strong and keen as many of these are, a vast deal of valuable light is shut out by ignorance of turning-points in the history of human civilization thus far. Never was this want of broad historical views in leaders of American opinion more keenly felt than now. Think of the blindness to one of the greatest things which gives renown to nations, involved in the duty levied by Congress upon works of art. Think, too, of the blindness to one of the main agencies in the destruction of every great republic thus far, shown in the neglect to pass a constitutional amendment which shall free us from the danger of *coups d'état* at the counting of the electoral vote. Think of the cool disregard of the plainest teachings of general history involved in legislative carelessness or doctrinaire opposition to measures remedying illiteracy in our Southern States. Never was this want of broad historical views more evident in our legislation than now. In the early history of this republic we constantly find that such men as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, to say nothing of the lesser lights, drew very largely and effectively from their studies of human history. In the transition period such men as Calhoun, John Quincy Adams, Everett, and Webster drew a large part of their strength from this source. And in the great period through which we have recently passed the two statesmen who wrought most powerfully to shape vague hopes into great events—William Henry Seward and Charles Sumner—were the two of all American statesmen in their time who drew inspiration and strength from a knowledge of the general history of mankind. Nothing but this could have kept up Seward's faith or Sumner's purpose. The absence of this sort of light among our public men at present arises doubtless from the necessities of our material development since the Civil War, and the demand for exact arithmetical demonstration in finance rather than moral demonstration in broad questions of public policy; but as we approach the normal state of things

more and more, the need of such general studies must grow stronger and stronger.

As regards the work of our American universities and colleges in the historical field, we must allow that it is woefully defective; but there are signs, especially among those institutions which are developing out of the mass of colleges into universities, of a better time coming. They must indeed yield to the current sweeping through the age. This is an epoch of historical studies. It is a matter of fact, simple and easily verified, that whereas in the last century state problems and world problems were as a rule solved by philosophy, and even historians such as Voltaire and Gibbon and Robertson were rather considered as philosophers than as historians, in this century such problems are studied most frequently in the light of history.

Still another encouraging fact is that advanced studies of every sort are more and more thrown into the historic form; the growth of the historical school in political economy is but one of many examples of this. More and more it is felt that "the proper study of mankind is man"; more and more clear becomes the idea enforced by Draper, that the greatest problems of humanity must be approached not so much by the study of the individual man as by the study of man in general and historically.

To this tendency the great universities of the old world have already conformed, and to this the institutions for advanced instruction in our own country must conform before they can take any proper rank in the higher education and be worthy to be called even the beginnings of universities.

It is largely in these institutions of learning that this work of historical study which I especially advocate—this union of close scientific analysis with a large philosophic synthesis—must begin. Unquestionably the number of professors devoted to historical investigation in the German universities is the great cause of the fact that Germany has surpassed other modern nations not only in special researches, but in general historical investigations. Important researches have indeed been made outside her univer-



sities, but the great majority of them have certainly been made by university men; and this indicates the lines on which historical studies are to be best developed in our own country. Every professor of history in a university should endeavor to present some special field with thoroughness; to extend, deepen, or quicken special knowledge in that field; to lead his students to investigations in it. Doubtless of all such fields that which, as a rule, will yield the most fruit to special and original investigation by American students will be found in English and American political, social, and constitutional history. But while the professor in an American university makes special studies, he ought to be laboring toward something like a conspectus of human history,—if not of all human history, at least of some great part of it. So shall he prevent his generalizations from becoming vague, and his investigations from becoming trivial.

During a recent residence in Germany I more than once found the ablest investigators, men of world-wide rank, lamenting the relative want of this large philosophical work. Said the Rector of one of the foremost universities to me: "It saddens me to see so many of my best young men confined entirely to mere specialties and niceties. The result of all this is an excessive specialization of study which, if carried much further, will render a university impossible."

To lead American students in our universities and colleges prematurely and mainly into special and original investigations is simply to fasten upon them the character of petty annalists. With such special work should go, *pari passu*, thoughtful study of great connected events.

Among many examples proving this necessity, in the university professor, of large general studies in connection with the best special work, we have some especially striking in our own time. Who does not see that Professor Freeman's admirable researches into mediæval history derive perhaps the greater part of their cogency from the very wide range of his studies in time and space? Who does not feel that even when he is investigating the minutest point in what



Milton compared to the "wars of kites and crows," the habit of mind engendered by this general study adds vastly to the value of his special study, enabling him to see what lies under the mere surface history here and to strike the turning-point there? So, too, with Professor Goldwin Smith. Who of us does not feel during his discussion of the simplest point, even of local Canadian history, that we are in the grasp of a man who brings to the subject a broad knowledge which enables him to flood the pettiest local event with light as the simple annalist and mere special investigator could never do? Who that has had the pleasure of hearing such professors as Ernst Curtius at Berlin, or Oncken at Giessen, has not seen that the secret of strength in the German professor is not, as commonly supposed, merely in his minute investigation, but very largely in his illumination of special research by broad general study? Such are special studies when combined with general studies. But who has not seen them when not thus combined?

So have I known a local historian devote himself to abstruse study of such questions in the history of a country town as whether the fire-engine house was originally in the neighborhood of the village school or of the town pump, and whether a petty official recently departed was at an early period of his life in sympathy with the Presbyterians or Methodists.

It is to be hoped then that at the future meetings of an Association such as we now contemplate papers may be frequently presented giving the results not only of good special work in history and biography, work requiring keen critical analysis, but of good work in the larger field requiring a philosophical synthesis. There ought certainly to be a section or sections in American history, general and local, and perhaps in other special fields; but there ought to be also a section or sections devoted to general history, the history of civilization, and the philosophy of history.

Of course such a section will have its dangers. Just as in the section devoted to special history there will be danger

of pettiness and triviality, so in that devoted to general history there will be danger of looseness and vagueness—danger of attempts to approximate Hegel's shadowy results. But these difficulties in both fields the Association must meet as they arise. Certainly a confederation like this—of historical scholars from all parts of the country, stimulating each other to new activity—ought to elicit most valuable work in both fields, and to contribute powerfully to the healthful development on the one hand of man as man, and on the other to the opening up of a better political and social future for the nation at large.

None can feel this more strongly than the little band of historical scholars who, scattered through various parts of the country, far from great libraries and separate from each other, have labored during the last quarter of a century to keep alive in this country the flame of philosophical investigation of history as a means for the greater enlightenment of their country and the better development of mankind.